

Fort Belknap Indian Community



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Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Tribal Govt.)
Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Elected to administer the affairs of the community and
to represent the Assiniboiné and the Gros Ventre
Tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation)

TESTIMONY OF
Mr. Brian Wing
Councilman
Fort Belknap Indian Community Council
Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, Montana

BEFORE THE MONTANA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE JOINT APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
on
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

February 15, 2011

I am pleased to be here today to provide testimony to the Subcommittee on the budget cuts within the Department of Public Health and Human Services, on behalf of the 7,000 Gros Ventre and Assiniboiné tribal members of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation located in North Central Montana.

The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation has been designated as a Medically Underserved Area and is considered very rural and isolated. Although all community members suffer as a result, our most vulnerable at risk group are our pre-school children, parents and families.

Economic and social statistics collected to document community needs clearly illustrates that the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation suffers from numerous social and economic deficiencies. The growing cycle of poverty and growing percentage of families with incomes below the poverty level contribute to the inability of parents to

adequately provide quality health services for their children. The following statistics have a detrimental influence upon the families resident on or near the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation.

Data collected on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation reveal the following:

- ◆ 53% are eligible for Medicaid or State subsidized Health Insurance
- ◆ 45% Have no Health Insurance coverage
- ◆ 40% of the Head Start children are from single parent families
- ◆ 54% of the families at Fort Belknap receive benefits under the TANF Program.

The Indian Health Services serves as the major resource for providing all family health (including immunizations), dental, and mental screening and referral services to the families residing on or near Fort Belknap, or those in the service unit designated area.

Supplemental nutritional services and training for parents is provided by the **Women's, Infant & Children (WIC)** Program, which is contracted by the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council through an agreement with the State of Montana. In 2010, the WIC Program at Fort Belknap served approximately 300 women through a \$57,000 grant from the State. The Indian Health Service does not fund such a program, so our program participants would go without.

Fort Belknap is also a recipient of \$256,000. from the State for our **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** Program. We currently have over 1,050 participants in this program. The average monthly assistance to these families is a meager \$350. per month. This is for rental of their homes, clothing for their children and a monthly allowance for food. Hardly enough is left for any type of social life or

any other necessities the parents or children could certainly use. With the high unemployment rate at Fort Belknap, approximately 65%, this is the only income that these families have.

We also have over 500 families participating in the **Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP)**. The average monthly assistance to participating families is \$700 per month. With this unseasonably cold and unexpected high snow fall this year, many of our families utilized this program to the full extent. Unfortunately many families were still without propane at the end of the month and these families went without propane and were forced to use their stoves to heat an entire house.

Fort Belknap is also supports The **Montana Tobacco Use Prevention Program**. Please do not let this legislative body eliminate this successful program. We understand that since 2000, MTUPP has helped cut Montana adult smoking by 23.2% and youth smoking by 46.5%. This has saved thousands of lives and millions of health care dollars saved.

We understand the legislative majority has slashed the governor's balanced by approximately 5% for all programs within State government. The budget the governor presented is balanced and sets aside \$238 million for an ending balance.

Our question to this body is 'Why all of the cuts?', especially for programs that serve the largest minority or the first Montanans in the State of Montana. These cuts to Indian Tribes in Montana are unnecessary and extremely harmful. The livelihood of many of our truly deserving families rely heavily on these programs. To cut or eliminate these programs would be devastating . The lives of our young children and older reservation resident deserve better.